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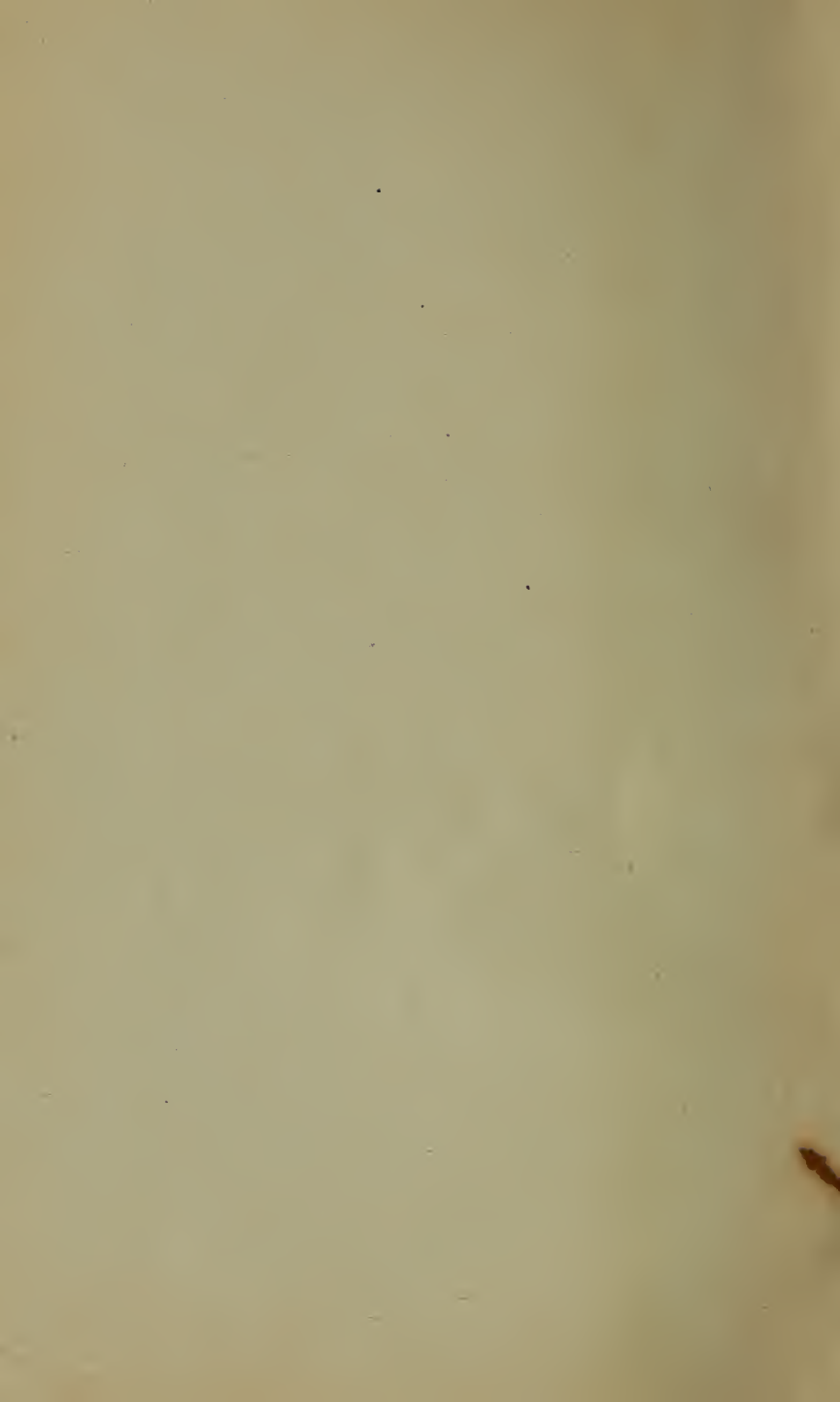
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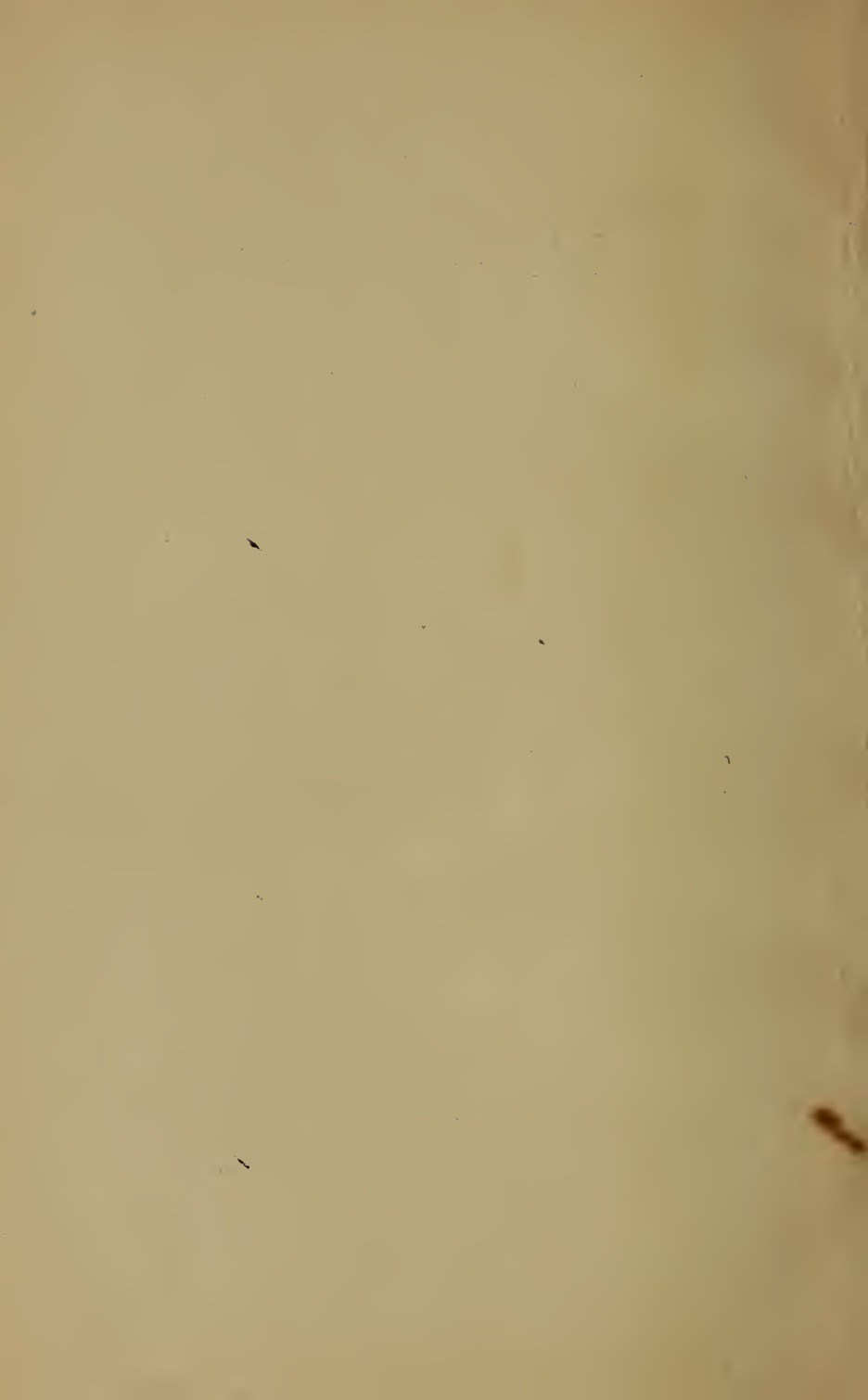
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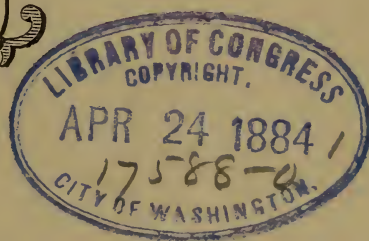




Heavenly Recognitions.

BY

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AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

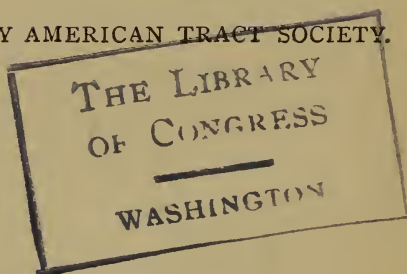
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Heavenly Recognitions.

Oh, talk to me of heaven. I love
To hear about my home above ;
For there doth many a loved one dwell
In light and joy ineffable.
Oh, tell me how they shine and sing,
While every harp rings echoing,
And every glad and tearless eye
Beams like the bright sun gloriously.
Tell me of that victorious palm
Each hand in glory beareth,
Tell me of that celestial calm
Each face in glory weareth. BOWLES.

As we walked, on an autumnal afternoon
from the new-made grave of a friend, my
companion said to me, " I feel sure that we
shall meet and know our loved ones in heaven,

but I often wish that something more clear and positive had been said about it in the Bible."

How many have said the same thing, and how many more have thought it, of the dear departed!

Yet we ought not to be surprised that so little is said in the Holy Scriptures about the recognition of friends in another life. Nothing is in them made more certain than the fact of the existence of heaven. But the details of the celestial life are entirely withheld. We are not told how the saved shall live, what air they shall breathe, where they shall abide, what they shall do. The Bible is silent about their life and their employments. The recognition of friends simply shares in the general reticence.

Yet there is, when one comes to study the subject, much in the Holy Scriptures that is clear and positive. The recognition

of friends is not indeed declared in formulated words, yet is made known. A fact may be announced even more emphatically by necessary inferences than by direct assertions. If I should see a man with packed trunks purchasing for himself tickets at the office of a European steamer, I would be, if possible, more sure that he was on his way to cross the ocean, than if he merely said that he was about to make the voyage. If it shall be found that the recognition, of which I am speaking, is a necessary inference from the teachings of the Bible, we may be quite as well satisfied of the fact as if it were systematically taught there.

It is not my purpose to dwell largely upon the possible knowledge which we may gain of the inhabitants of heaven, the elect angels who make glorious the streets of the New Jerusalem; or to speak much of the saints of all ages whose white robes gleam in its in-

effable light. Nor is it my purpose to linger in thought upon the excellence and power of that vision of the face of the Lord Jesus Christ where

“The God shines gracious through the man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all,”

and they are made like him while they see him as he is.

To behold the King of glory, to be assured of his love, to live in the calm sunshine of his favor, to be enfolded consciously in the infinite love of God made real in the person of the Lord Jesus, this would be enough to make the soul supremely happy and the bliss of heaven complete, were nothing else given to the saved. We might easily throw our conjectures and our fears upon the winds and be willing to give no thought and make no inquiries about our recognition of friends there. It would be heaven enough to see Him and

to know that we are safe and to be for ever with him.

So, too, the companionship of angels who have as ministering spirits watched over us in our earthly days, but whose faces we have never seen, will be very sweet. It will be good to mingle in their society, to recall the scenes in our history with which they have been concerned, and to talk of the kingdom of God with which they have had so much to do. And the acquaintance made with the saints of whom we have read, the inspiration of whose lives we have felt, who passed into the silent heavens centuries before we were born, but who will welcome us with smiles and love the moment we enter that holy place, will make companionships that will be for ever blessed.

I shall take these acquaintanceships for granted, and discuss simply the recognition, the renewed acquaintance with friends whom

we have known here below, after which there are so many yearnings and about which so many sorrowful and wondering questions are asked.

I propose to confine myself to what the Bible, in explicit statement or by necessary inference, teaches us, and not to bring forward arguments derived simply from reason. Without the indulgence of imagination or conjecture let us see what the Holy Scriptures say on this subject.

The old and tender Hebrew phrase announcing death is full of suggestive meaning: "He was gathered to his fathers." It was saying what made a part of common thought—those who were connected with the departed by ancestral ties had preceded him into the unseen world, and the dead had gone to join their company and to come into their fellowship. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me," exclaimed David over his dead child;

and the tearful words of three thousand years ago have found an instinctive utterance in the hearts of bereaved parents ever since. Our dear ones pass out of our sight and we cannot make them separated from us for ever. Without any argument the heart believes that somewhere and somehow there will be a meeting again.

We are told in the Scriptures that we shall be made complete in happiness in the coming world, that our cup of joy will be full. We have no reason to believe that we shall, in our thoughts or our feelings, be essentially changed. They will be purer and more exquisitely toned to give us delight. Very much of our present happiness is found in our social nature, in our associations with others. Loneliness is synonymous with gloom. You can think of nothing which carries more with it the idea of plaintive sadness than the entire absence of friends and

companions, of those who know and love you. The presence of others is not enough. The more numerous they are the more lonely you will be, if they are strangers. Perhaps under no circumstances is one so oppressed with a sense of utter loneliness as when jostled by the crowds of a strange city. The thousands may be about him, yet as he gazes into their faces, his heart pines all the more for some one that he knows. But if through the crowd he suddenly sees the form and familiar face of a friend from home, his heart bounds with a joy that is almost rapture.

Heaven might be full of angelic spirits and of saints from earth, and they might take us into their love the moment we entered their home, but still the heart would ask, even in the blessedness of their welcome and fellowships, for some familiar and loved one known before. Need we doubt that in heaven

this instinct and craving of the human heart shall be met? Could the happiness be complete without it?

Heaven is not a place where there is no association. The Christian does not come into it solitary and to live for ever alone. All the conceptions which the Bible gives are pervaded by the idea of companionship. The believer joins a glorious company, Heb. 12:22, 23, now when he comes to Jesus Christ. By-and-by, in even a more real and appreciable sense, he will "come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven and to the spirits of just men made perfect." He enters now, in spirit, into their companionship; then he will come into their society to be elevated, quickened, and made happy by it.

The old hymn of Bernard de Morlaix, has the thought in exquisite language—

Nescio, nescio, quæ jubilatio, lux tibi qualis,
Quam socialia gaudia, gloria quam specialis.

“ I know not, oh, I know not
What social joys are there;
What radiancy of glory,
What light beyond compare.” NEALE.

The Scriptures give us reason to believe that those who have been distinguished in God's kingdom on the earth will be at once recognized when seen in another life. The transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared with the Lord Jesus in His glory, teaches us much on this point. They seem to have been immediately known. The apostles had, from their childhood, been familiar with the history and character of these men of God, and as soon as they appeared they were known to be the great law-giver and prophet. Their appearance corresponded with the previous conception.

Precisely the same would be the result of

a sight of them in another life. If recognized here, still more would they be known there.

The words of our Lord, "And I say unto you that many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God," point in the same direction. The saved shall recline, as at a feast—so the figure is—with these patriarchs in familiar fellowship. If they are thus known, why should not those of whom we have not simply had a conception, but have been with in intimate friendship here on earth, with whom we have talked and sung and prayed, whom we have loved and rejoiced in through many a year of blessed memory, why should they not be recognized and known?

Heaven may well crown with immortality the true and sweet companionships some of us have had with saints on earth. They walked like the shining ones here below, and

they walk among the host of the redeemed, fit companions for any of the blessed throng. Why then should we be compelled to discover and choose new and unknown associates? What conceivable reason should there be for us to be for ever separated from old friends and have given us only strange faces and strange forms, glorious and blessed though they be, for our new friendships and communings?

Here below we found an ethereal joy and hallowed delight together in the things of God, moments of prayer and praise, hours of sympathy in religious things which were like heaven; why should all these be dropped, the old circle be broken and scattered for ever, and with careful separation each saint be sundered from all he loved on earth, and be put among the unfamiliar and the unknown? We cannot easily believe it.

Nor can we believe that all those social

instincts and affections which God has given us shall be for ever laid aside when we reach heaven. This would make a change so essential in us that we have no reason to suppose that it will ever take place. If they remain, if we carry with us thither our present and inborn cravings after love and companionship, then the happiness of heaven would not be complete were they not met and gratified, not merely by sight and recognition, but by association and friendship with those we have known on earth. We shall not be wandering for ever among the multitudes of heaven, evermore looking wishfully into the faces of the glorified to find some whom we knew on earth, and whom we have been so longing to greet and sighing that we could not see them. We cannot believe that!

Nothing could prevent this unsatisfied longing—which would cloud even the bliss of heaven—but a total oblivion of earthly his-

tory. For us to lose all desire to see those whom we have known and had fellowship with on earth in our spiritual life, it would be necessary to blot out the memory of earth. All our religious history is intimately connected with others. The mother at whose knee you knelt, whose prayers were like angel benedictions on your head as you slept, the father whose arm was around you and who wept in joy with you as you told him of your new-found hope in Christ; the teacher who led you to the Saviour; the pastor whose words awakened you and whose counsels brought you to the place of peace; the friends with whom you have gone to the house of God in company and with whom you have sat in heavenly places, though on earth—these all have been so associated with your life, that it were simply impossible for you to be in heaven and not remember them. Memory must first be lost.

But what would we be without memory? We would not recognize ourselves. With all the past blotted out and gone we would lose the means of self-identification, would enter heaven and be there strangers, not only to all around, but even to ourselves. Such a radical change, such an utter and absolute loss of an essential part of our human nature we cannot suppose. Indeed the very songs of heaven forbid it: "And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation." Rev. 5:9. It is memory rehearsing in song the work of Jesus on earth.

We have every reason to suppose that as the story of the cross will make the theme of praise, so a view of the leadings of God's providence, the varied influences of the Holy Spirit as they have shaped the believer's

earthly life, the changeful scenes, little understood then, but now seen to be the necessary steps to the glory which has been reached, will be an element of the happiness of heaven while the saved dwell upon them with wonder and joy.

If this be so, then the conclusion cannot be escaped that others will be associated with us in the review. They have so intermingled in the history that to separate them from it would be impossible. As they alone could sympathize with us in the review, to be without them, to have no one with whom we could speak of the past, with whom we could call up scenes which are indissolubly connected with our very presence in heaven, would be contrary to the essential conception of that blissful place.

Such oblivion the apostle Paul clearly never contemplated. With what emotions of profoundest joy he looks forward to meeting

those in whose salvation he had had a part: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? for ye are our glory and joy." 1 Thess. 2:19. So he exclaims in his first and early letter to the Thessalonians, as if he would derive a sort of consolation for his disappointment at not being able to see their faces, which he had "endeavored the more abundantly" to do "with great desire" (verse 17), from that anticipated meeting with them in heaven in the presence of the Lord of glory.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church Paul makes this anticipated meeting with his Christian friends in the revealed glory of Christ the ground of his solace and strength in the extremity of present trials: "For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mor-

tal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed and therefore have I spoken; we also believe and therefore speak: knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." 2 Cor. 4:11-14. The presentation of them with him was a matter of "knowing," and connected itself with their assured resurrection and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit-taught apostle anticipated no extinction of memory, no oblivion of the past, no loss of holy associations and friendships. No; rather the coming into the kingly presence of his ascended Lord, with the endeared friends to whom he had been useful, rose before him, a vision of gladness that made the passing work and pain of small account.

Once before in this same Epistle, 2 Cor. 1:14, Paul speaks of this contemplated union

in glory with his fellow-believers whom he had led to the Saviour, as a matter of joy to both of them: "Ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." So, too, in his Epistle to the Colossians, Col. 1 : 28, he speaks of this meeting with those to whom he had preached as making an inspiration to work and to faithfulness : "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." His repetition of the words "every man" would seem to preclude the thought that these friends whom the Holy Spirit had given him would be lost in the unrecognized host of the redeemed.

With what a tone of calm satisfaction and joy does Paul speak, not only of an anticipated meeting and recognition, but of continued and abiding fellowship in heaven with his Thessalonian friends, 2 Thess. 1 : 7: "And

to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." He looks forward to the revelation of the triumphant Christ as the time when all the struggles of himself and of these friends would be for ever past and the eternal rest would have come. Like battle-scarred warriors, like tempest-tossed sailors, like long-wandering travellers, wearied but at home, with hand-graspings and congratulations they would look into each other's faces with smiles and unspeakable satisfaction—"rest with you!"

Shall we, can we, doubt that what Paul looked forward to so gladly will be given to all the saved who in their measure have been connected with the spiritual life of friends below?

The resurrection of our Lord and of the dead leads us to the same conclusion. Our Lord, although strangely changed, and wear-

ing a body far different from that with which his disciples had been so familiar, was at once recognized by them. Surprised and bewildered by his unexpected appearance—as we have been at the sudden meeting of a friend whom we thought to be on another continent, and we have not been able “to believe our eyes”—they did not know him. But a look, a gesture, a word spoken in the old familiar way, recalled him, “and they knew him.” The saints will rise from the dead, their forms essentially the same, the aspect of the soul appearing more distinctly than ever before in the body that clothes it, and they will be recognized, perhaps, with far greater facility than they are now after a brief absence.

It is the soul appearing through the features, even here, that marks identity. Your friend has been away for a long season, and you meet again. At first all seems so changed that the attendant circumstances alone con-

vince you that it is he; not a trace of the old features seems to remain. But as you talk, out of the changed eye there comes the old look, the voice assumes the old tone, the features put on their old aspect, and, amid the awakened sympathies, your friend is back again; the abyss of years is gone, you are together as in the days of yore. Soul-contact has assured the recognition.

It is entirely probable that the bodies which the saints shall wear in glory will exhibit in a transparent way the qualities of the soul. All those characteristics of excellence and loveliness which make those we love beautiful will be in them there sublime and perfect. These qualities are what make them known and loved by us now. These are what now we love, irrespective of physical form and feature. Then they will abide in unchanging excellence, and will shine through the celestial bodies which hold them with an

entirely unobscured radiance. Why should they, then, not be recognized by all who have ever known and loved them? why not be known with an intuition more immediate than in this present life? You will, I think, select them out from the shining throng as you could from no earthly gathering. You will gaze upon those celestial features with a rapture of delight which earth never knew—its atmosphere was so heavy, and the “earthly vesture of decay” so grossly shut them in.

“I know thou art gone where thy forehead is starred
With the beauty that dwelt in thy soul,”

was the instinctive cry of one who had seen in the departed an indwelling loveliness that had found no expression in the earthly form. That heavenly clime shall bring to the soul an immortal bloom, and a celestial body shall clothe it with fitting form and feature. And shall all eyes gaze with delight, except those who most loved those sainted ones on

earth? May we not be sure that those very eyes shall see them first and most, even as they would be the first to exult in the exceeding beauty? This will be one of the joys of heaven next to seeing the King in his beauty—to see the holy beauty which we saw only dimly here below. Here you have caught glimpses of it in the wan face and in the eye that would grow hazy with the excess of pain. Those glimpses were revelations. What will it be to gaze upon a face where no shadow rests, into an eye which is only a sky of gladness and peace!

To sum it all up, the Bible teaches us that while the presence of the Lord would make sufficient the bliss of heaven, yet the nature of its happiness, its worship, the constitution of our nature, and the teachings of the resurrection, all lead us to the belief that the saved shall know and rejoice in their sainted ones who have gone before into glory,

and that they shall welcome those who follow, to complete the thankfulness and the joy.

“No partings yonder;
Time and space never
Again shall sunder.
Hearts cannot sever;
Dearer and fonder
Hands clasp for ever.”

BONAR.

President Edwards, when dying, said to his daughter, “Dear Lucy, it seems to be the will of God that I must shortly leave you: therefore give my dearest love to my dear wife, and tell her that the uncommon union which has so long subsisted between us has been of such a nature as, I trust, is spiritual, and therefore will continue for ever.”

There is a deep-toned significance in these words of a man who knew, as few have known, the innermost recesses of religious life. By an almost absolute necessity we project our present thoughts and impressions

into the future world. Surrounded and connected with the seen and the material, it is well nigh impossible to place ourselves where both material and seen things have for ever passed away. Yet we are assured that the heavenly state will be spiritual. It will not be earth made immortal. "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." The merely earthly will have passed away for ever; but what is spiritual and connected with the life of God will abide in higher and purer forms. The only hope of reunion yonder is in a spiritual life on earth. If here below there has been a walking together in company with God, death will not make any essential change; the earthly life may simply glide into the heavenly, to be refined and beatified in the purer atmosphere of that world of glory.

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